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LIGHT IN THE CLOUD:

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Reasons for Renouncing Infidelity.

TWO SERMONS,

PREACHED IN AUGUSTINE CHURCH, CLAPHAM ROAD, LONDON,
ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 10TH, 1876.

BY

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Member of the American Institute of Christian Philosophy;
Fellow of the Society of Science, London.*

"Come what, come may,
I know this world is richer than I thought,
By something left to it from paradise;
I know this world is brighter than I thought,
Having a window into heaven; henceforth
Life has for me a purpose and a drift."

—Sir Henry Taylor.

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PREFACE



It is hardly necessary to write a preface to the two Sermons which follow. They were preached at the time and place named on the title page, and the reader will have no difficulty in discovering the object had in view in their preparation and delivery. For some twenty years, or thereabouts, as is tolerably well known, I occupied a somewhat conspicuous position in the ranks of the so-called advanced thinkers. About fourteen years ago, I was led by a course of providential circumstances to reconsider the whole question of Christian Evidences, which I had for so long a time been accustomed to look upon as closed so far as I was concerned, and the result was the discovery of the utter fallacy of my sceptical views. Gradually I returned—as far as the broad principles of Christian Truth were concerned—to the faith of my early life, and finally to the position with which I commenced my public career, that of a minister of the Gospel of Christ.

As I was continually coming into contact with my former sceptical co-workers, I was repeatedly requested to state the reasons which had led to my change of views. To do this effectually would require several goodly sized volumes upon

the various branches of what is called Apologetics. Some of these had been then already published, and others have followed since, and have met with a large sale, both in England and America. But a want was still felt for a few brief facts in a small compass, setting forth the course of thought which had led me to my present view, such as could be placed in the hands of confirmed sceptics, doubters, and Christians of wavering faith.

At the suggestion of several of my ministerial brethren, I preached and published, nine years ago, the two Sermons that follow. Of course the subjects discussed are not pretended to be dealt with in an exhaustive manner; the thoughts are adapted to the form in which they were delivered, and were given to the world, as two discourses simply—not as a learned, critical, and elaborate treatise.

After the first two editions of the published Sermons were exhausted, the small volume remained long out of print, and I had no idea, until recently, of bringing out a reissue. Since I have been in America, however, a great number of applications have been made for copies, and hence the appearance of this edition, which I trust may be productive of good in this country, as I have reason to know it was in England.

GEORGE SEXTON.

TORONTO, CANADA, August 1st, 1885.

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TO THE

REV. DAVID THOMAS, D.D.,

A Theological Author—*haud ulli secundus*—of unsurpassed
clearness, a preacher of transcendent ability, and, above all,
a Christian with a large heart, whose influence upon the
Churches of his age has been greater than that of any of
his contemporaries,

THE FOLLOWING SERMONS

ARE DEDICATED

BY HIS SINCERE FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.



"WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD."

"Without God in the world."—EPHESIANS II. 12.

On reading carefully the chapter from which this text is selected, there can be no difficulty whatever in arriving at a correct conclusion as to the kind of persons to whom the Apostle referred. Strictly speaking, it is a matter of impossibility to be "without God in the world," since, as God is omnipresent, even the Atheist, who disbelieves in His existence, must live continually in His presence, and be every moment subject to His Power. But it is not to Atheists that the Apostle referred in the text, as will be obvious from his language. The people described by him were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise," were, in fact, Gentiles, and, therefore, not partakers of the glorious privileges of Israel. It is exceedingly improbable that they were disbelievers in the existence of God, since Atheism was never very popular, and no more in that age than in this was likely to be entertained by any very large number of people. These Gentiles may possibly have been believers in the multiplicity of Gods rather than disbelievers in any, or they may have been Pantheists, believing that everything was God. Still the Apostle speaks of them as being without God in the world. The reason is obvious enough: they were out of Christ, and, as without Him no

true conception of Deity can be formed, they were literally without God. On this point I shall have more to say in the evening discourse, and may, therefore, pass it by for the present, and proceed now to deal with the more general aspect of the question and its application to the state of things existing in our own day. In considering this I shall notice:—

I. The various kinds of people who are “without God in the world.”

II. What the being “without God in the world” involves.

In dealing with these questions I shall be compelled—in fact, under the circumstances, it will be expected of me—to speak frequently of my own experience—a course which I always take with a great amount of reluctance, because it involves the necessity of so frequently introducing the pronoun *I*, as to appear to savour of egotism. In this case, however, it is unavoidable, and I shall only detail my own experience as far as it has any bearing on the question under consideration, and in such a way as is likely to prove beneficial to others who may be in danger of striking against the rocks where I myself suffered shipwreck.

I. The various kinds of people who are “without God in the world.”

In the present day there are several classes of persons that may be included in this category.

1. There are those who deny the existence of God altogether, and who would be, perhaps, better described as anti-Theists than Atheists. True, these are not very numerous, because the most extreme sceptics generally content themselves with saying that they see no evidence of the existence of God, or, at all events, that the evidence that

is forthcoming is insufficient to produce conviction in their minds, but that they are by no means prepared to affirm that a God does not exist. A few men there are, however, and among them the leading man in the so-called Free-thought movement, who take the irrational course of maintaining in the most positive and dogmatic manner that there is no God. As a matter of course, such an attitude is preposterous in the extreme, since no man can be in a position to affirm positively that there is no God, unless he could become endowed with the attributes of infinity, and thus become God himself. For how can he tell what there is in the remote parts of the universe, upon which human eyes have not gazed, and into which human thought has not penetrated? For aught that he can tell, in regions far beyond his range of vision, evidences of the existence of God may abound in such profusion as to overwhelm scepticism ten times more obstinate than his own.

Atheism is both irrational and opposed to the highest instincts of humanity. It is neither conformable to reason nor to that feeling which lies far deeper down in man's nature, which the Germans call God-consciousness, and from which springs the belief in Deity. In all nations and in all ages men have believed in God. Sometimes this faith has become terribly distorted by the large admixture of error which is found interwoven with it, but underneath all abuses there is invariably to be discovered the sound substratum of truth, which is impossible to be rooted out of human nature. In all the great civilizations of antiquity, faith in some sort of God will be found standing prominently in the foreground of universal opinion, and among savages it is questionable whether it is ever altogether absent. Artemidorus and Plutarch both positively assert that no race of men was to be found among whom this belief did

not prevail. Recently, however, it has been the fashion to point to a few tribes of savages who are said to be utterly destitute of any knowledge of God, and in whose languages, in truth, no words can be found to denote a Supreme Being, a future state, or any kind of religion. My own opinion is, that the truth of this is very questionable; but, even if it were not, the argument would assuredly prove a most unfortunate one for an Atheist to employ, for it would tend to show that intelligent and civilized man had always believed in God, and that, naturally, Atheists were only to be looked for amongst the Aborigines of Australia, the Bosjesmans, and a few other savage tribes in Africa; all so utterly degraded and so low in the scale of humanity as to be incapable of receiving the influence of civilization, or the simplest rudiments of any kind of education. Atheism is utterly repugnant to humanity in a healthy condition, and no amount of reasoning is likely to cause it to be accepted by any large number of people. The dreadful loneliness that is felt in the mind when the belief in God has died out from the soul, is of so terrible a character that to give a description of it is simply impossible. Then may be felt what has been so graphically described by Jean Paul Richter—rendered into English in the powerful language of Thomas Carlyle—but even in an intenser form than is there depicted. He remarks—it is Christ who is supposed to be speaking—“I went through the worlds, I mounted into the suns, and flew with the galaxies through the wastes of heaven; but there is no God. I descended as far as being casts its shadow, and looked down into the abyss and cried, ‘Father, where art thou?’ But I heard only the everlasting storm which no one guides, and the gleaming rainbow of creation hung, without a sun that made it, over the abyss and trickled down. And when I looked up to the immeasurable world for the Divine

Eye, it glared on me with an empty, black, bottomless *eye-socket*, and eternity lay upon chaos, eating it and ruminating it. Cry on, ye dissonances, cry away the shadows, for He is not. The pale-grown shadows flitted away, as white vapour, which frost has formed with the warm breath, disappears, and all was void. And then came, fearful for the heart, the dead children who had been awakened in the church-yard into the temple, and cast themselves before the high form on the altar, and said, 'Jesus, have we no Father?' And He answered with streaming tears, 'We are all orphans, I and you; we are without Father.' Then came louder shrieking dissonances, parting asunder of quivering temple-walls, grinding press of worlds, the torch dance of celestial wild-fires, glimmering souls upon the sea of Death, void of immensity. Dead, dumb Nothingness, Cold, everlasting Necessity, Frantic Chance! "Aye, my brethren, little know ye the state of mind of the man in whom the belief in God has died out, and who feels himself a helpless orphan, tossed on the everlasting sea of chance with no compass to steer by, no pilot to guide, and no chart of the ocean on which he is drifting, he knows not where. But more of this hereafter. Suffice it to say, that all the highest and loftiest instincts of humanity point to God, and hence the universal belief in His existence.

Nor is Atheism any more conformable to reason than to conscience. Arguments *à priori* and *à posteriori* are both conclusive in favour of the being of a God. The former of these I deem unanswerable, but perhaps too abstruse for the popular mind, and may, therefore, here be passed by; the latter falls within the range of every man's thinking. I remarked in the little volume I wrote in reply to Professor Tyndall's Belfast address, what I may here repeat: "Nature proclaims aloud through all her works that a Divine Work-

man lives; and, consequently, the better the phenomena of the universe are understood, the more will this truth be apparent. The more perfect the knowledge of matter and its laws, the greater will the need be felt for the operation of a Divine mind to fashion its every form, to guide its every force, and to direct it into every end that is reached.

"The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills, and the plains,
Are not these, O soul! the vision of Him who reigns?
Is not the vision He—though He be not that which He seems?
Dreams are true while they last, and do we not live in dreams?
Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and spirit with spirit can meet;
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet."

The idea of causation, if followed out, must lead inevitably to God. You cannot trace accurately the connection between cause and effect, without ending in a final cause—i.e., an uncaused cause. This is, in truth, the idea that is necessarily involved in causation, and any other view would render causation itself unnecessary. An infinite series of causes and effects is utterly inconceivable, because, in that case, there would be no true cause at all. Wollaston adopted an illustration, which puts this in a very clear light. Suppose an infinite number of links in a chain suspended from the sky. The question immediately occurs—By what power is this chain held up? And to say that each link supports the other will not satisfy the requirements of the mind, because we shall want to know what supports the whole chain. This demand flows naturally from the laws of thought, and the question that it asks must be answered. The true idea of a cause, as it shapes itself in the human mind, is, as Dr. Samuel Clark has ably shown: First, that it causes something else; and second, that it is itself uncaused. In a series of causes and effects, any one may be a provisional cause, but not a real one. In following out this process of thought, we must necessarily, in the end, reach an uncaused

cause, and this must be capable of producing the various effects which we observe. Now, we all know this must be discovered in a self-existent Being or nowhere. Even Herbert Spencer, the Corypheus of modern sceptical philosophy, admits that the doctrine of causation leads to a first cause. In his "First Principles" he remarks: "We cannot think at all about the impressions which the external world produces on us without thinking of them as caused; and we cannot carry out an inquiry concerning their causation without inevitably committing ourselves to the hypothesis of a first cause."

The modern scientific theory recognizes in all phenomena the operation of what is called Force. Spirit it gets rid of, and sometimes matter too, reserving only the operation of Force. Electricity and magnetism, and heat and light, are all so many modes of motion, or forms of force. Life, too, it is now said, is only another form of force, and intelligence is being placed in the same category. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that it is so; then what follows? The first form of force must have been the highest, because it must have included within itself all the rest, which were to be subsequently evolved; since, if it did not, they must have been added afterwards, which, as they had no existence, would have been impossible. Well, the highest form of force, upon this principle, is intelligence. Intelligence, therefore, must have been the primal condition of force. But there can be no intelligence except in connection with consciousness, and where there is consciousness there is personality. What, then, is the conclusion to which we are driven? Why, this, that there must have been from all eternity a conscious Intelligent Being, and this Being we call God. And this, in fact, is the only solution of the problem which presents itself to us on every hand in exter-

nal nature. The sole real force with which we are acquainted by experience is volition, and, arguing from analogy, we reach a Divine Volition, only another name for God. Sir William Thompson admirably remarks: "Overpoweringly strong proofs of intelligent and benevolent design lie all round us, and if ever perplexities—whether metaphysical or scientific—turn us away for a time, they come back upon us with irresistible force." Of the truth of this no man is better able to judge than I am, and I wonder now how it was that such doubts and perplexities could ever have beset me. Still there are thousands of others in the same position, and for their sake I take up this subject.

2. Those who deny the Divine Personality, and who are usually called, or who describe themselves as, Pantheists. Pantheism has flourished very largely in the world at different times, and under different forms and appearances. Sometimes it has been full of life and vitality, at other times dry and barren as Atheism itself. We meet with it at an early period in India; we find it prevailing among the Greeks and the Romans; and it has re-appeared in Germany most extensively, and to a small degree in England, at the present time. An ancient poet wrote as follows:—

"Jove first exists, whose thunders roll above;
Jove last, Jove midmost, all proceed from Jove;
Female is Jove; the immortal Jove is male.
Jove the broad earth, the heavens, irradiate, pale;
Jove is the boundless spirit, Jove, the fire,
That warms the world with feeling and desire,
The sea is Jove, the sun, the lunar ball;
Jove, King Supreme, the Sovereign Lord of all.
All power is His, to Him all glory give,
For His vast form embraces all that live."

Æschylus, too, writes:—

"Jupiter is the air,
Jupiter is the earth,
Jupiter is the heaven,
All is Jupiter."

This sort of stuff sounds very well in poetry, but nothing can be more nonsensical, when put into the plain language of matter of fact, and tested by the power of reason. We meet with a similar kind of doctrine in the teachings of Spinoza, in the seventeenth century, and it appears in a more fascinating, but less logical, form in the writings of Hegel, and Schelling, in the nineteenth. There is a kind of Pantheism, too, which pervades our literature to-day, abundantly displayed in the works of Emerson, who seems to discover the true object of worship in the soul of man, peeping out occasionally in the profounder writings of Thomas Carlyle, and more distinctly enunciated in such poems as Bailey's "Festus." Pantheism is never likely to take very deep root in the English mind, because the soil will be found to be uncongenial to its development. Still, it is, to some extent, fashionable to-day, like many other vagaries, that are taken up more for the novelty of the thing than from any other cause.

In theory, Pantheism and Atheism are as wide asunder as the poles; practically they amount to very much the same thing. For although the Atheist sees God nowhere, and the Pantheist beholds him everywhere, both ignore His Personality, and, therefore, His Providence. Atheism discovers in matter the potency of every form of life; Pantheism holds that matter itself is a mode of the one great existence, which it designates God; but whether you call the universe matter or spirit is of very little moment, if, in either case, it is held to be impersonal. Pantheism, like Atheism, gets rid of creation, of providence, of prayer, of immortality—i.e., a distinct individual immortality—of revelation, and, in truth, of absolute moral distinctions between right and wrong. It is utterly fallacious, and cannot for one moment stand the test of a rational examination.

For, as I have before remarked, intelligence is necessarily based upon consciousness, and consciousness must be identified with personality. If God, therefore, be impersonal, He is unconscious, consequently unintelligent—*ergo* non-existent. The logical resting-place of Pantheism, therefore, is in Atheism.

3. Those who maintain that God is unknowable, and beyond the range of human conception. This position is taken to-day by a considerable number of persons; amongst them may probably be classed the leading scientific men of the age. Such was the view enunciated by Professor Tyndall in his celebrated Belfast address, and is that held by the followers of Auguste Comte. These men are quite prepared to believe that there may be a God, but they maintain that He is so far removed from the range of human investigation, and even human thought, that it is utterly impossible that we can form the slightest conception regarding His character; and that, consequently, He sustains no relationship whatever towards ourselves. Professor Huxley somewhere speaks of the region of the supernatural as being synonymous with the domain of the Unknowable, which, while it will always exist, is gradually being pushed further and further from us by the discoveries of science. Touching this same Unknowable, by the way—about which there is so much said, and so much written now-a-days—it is very curious how much information people seem to possess respecting it. The Unknowable, in fact, judging by what is affirmed of it by those who talk most loudly about it, seems, after all, to be pretty well known. Now, the view that any search for the supernatural in nature is useless, because men's faculties are limited to the investigation of the natural, is a position which I myself took for a great number of years, and it is one which is far more prevalent

and far more rational than the dogmatic Atheism or the whimsical Pantheism before referred to. But, after all, a great deal of the difficulty arising from the investigation of what is called the supernatural arises from the vague meaning which is usually attached to the term. Dr. Bushnell, than whom there is hardly a better authority on the subject, says: "That is supernatural, whatever it be, that is not in the chain of natural cause and effect, or which acts on the chain of cause and effect without the chain," which, in a word, simply means the introduction into the chain of a new cause, such as volition. Taking this view of the case, there is no difficulty whatever of conceiving of the existence and operation of the supernatural; nor is the action of the Divine Volition, which controls the phenomena of nature, any more beyond the range of human conception than the human volition which direct the movements of a steam engine, where the being in whom such volition resides may be completely hidden from our view. God is a necessity, and cannot, therefore, be ignored, and the teaching which inculcates the leaving the question of His existence as a problem which cannot be solved is utterly futile. For there is no escape from the problem. It will press itself upon the mind whether we will or not, and however much we may attempt to ignore it, and to push it out of the region of active thought, it will ever and anon come back with all the force with which it first made itself known. The search for God, therefore, will be made by the human mind, however much scientists may advise the contrary, and philosophers preach up the improbability of any satisfactory results from the procedure.

God is, and will, therefore, be known. He has established a relationship between Himself and man, which renders it necessary that something shall be known of His

Nature and Attributes, and that something has been learned by tens of thousands of men in the past, and will be learned by tens of thousands more. You may not find Him in the hurricane or the whirlwind, in the earthquake or the storm, but, in our case, as in that of an ancient prophet, He ever comes in the still small voice which speaks to the inner consciousness of man. Scientists may fail to discover God, and philosophers to apprehend His majesty and might, but, to the simple-minded Christian, He makes Himself known by a process far more certain than any physical demonstration in the external world.

4. There is another class of men to whom a reference may be made, under a separate heading, as being "without God in the world," although large numbers of them would, no doubt, fall into one or other of the divisions already mentioned. I refer now to those who deny the Divine Providence, and maintain the supremacy of Natural Law. Atheists and Pantheists, no doubt, both take this view, but it is also taken by people who profess to believe in some sort of God. They seem to imagine that whatever may have happened in the past with regard to the creation of the universe, that at present all the phenomena of nature are simply the result of the operation of natural law. Deists there are who fancy that millions of years ago God created the material universe, to which He then imparted certain powers and forces very much on the principle that a man makes a clock, and that now it goes on of its own accord, without any interference on the part of the Maker, save and except that perhaps—although that point is not very clear—it might occasionally want adjusting, mending, or putting right in some way or other. Nothing can be more preposterous than this view, since, if there be a God at all, the universe must not only have been created by Him, but must

every moment be dependent on His power—in truth, could not exist for a single instant without being upheld by His Divine wisdom and Love. As Sir Isaac Newton remarks, “A God without dominion, providence, and final causes, is nothing but fate and nature.” It is, however, mainly those who seem to put law in the place of God that we have particularly to do with. Much egregious nonsense is now-a-days talked about law. Ask the cause of the various phenomena as they appear around us, and you are answered, law. Inquire how so perfect an arrangement, and such exquisite beauty and harmony as is seen in nature, was brought about, and you are told, by law. Ask how did animals and plants first come into being, and whence came man, with his profound mental powers, his imagination, his judgment, his understanding, and his will, and the answer is, law did it all.

“From floating elements in chaos hurled
Self-formed of atoms sprang our infant world;
No great First Cause inspired the happy plot,
But all was matter—and no matter what.”

Nothing can possibly show a more thorough misconception of the real meaning of the word law than the mode in which these men constantly employ it. Law is not an entity, it is not a thing, and cannot be treated as a cause. It is not even a power or a force, but simply a mode in which phenomena occur. An established order of antecedence and sequence is called a law; but, then, the term neither explains the force producing the phenomena, nor the *modus operandi* by which they occur. If law were a force, it would require an intelligent agent to guide it; but it is not even that, and hence both the Intelligence which guides and the Force which is guided have to be looked for elsewhere. In no case will the word law explain the purpose which is seen amongst almost all the phenomena of

nature. In the organs of our own bodies, in the structure of a plant, in the formation of a crystal, and in the revolution of a world, there is distinct indication of a special purpose and plan. As the Duke of Argyll has very ably said, "The very idea of function is inseparable from the idea of purpose. The function of an organ is its purpose; and the relation of its parts, and of the whole, to that purpose is as much and as definitely a scientific fact as the relation of any other phenomenon to space, or time, or number." The word law explains nothing, but serves, in the mode in which it is usually employed, to make confusion worse confounded. Law is but the expression of the volition of God, and inapplicable from any other point of view. A modern poet has most beautifully put the case as follows:—

"To matter or to force
The All is not confined;
Beside the law of things
Is set the law of mind;
One speaks in rock and star,
And one within the brain;
In unison at times
And then apart again;
And both in one have brought us hither
That we may know our whence and whither.

"The sequences of law
We learn through mind alone;
'Tis only through the soul
That aught we know is known;
With equal voice she tells
Of what we touch and see
Within the bounds of life,
And of a life to be;
Proclaiming One who brought us hither,
And holds the keys of whence and whither.

"Oh, shrine of God that now
Must learn itself with awe!
Oh, heart and soul that move
Beneath a living law;
That which seemed all the rule
—Of Nature, is but part;

A larger, deeper law,
Claims also soul and heart;
The force that framed and bore us hither,
Itself at once is whence and whither.

"We may not hope to read
Nor comprehend the whole,
Or of the law of things
Or of the law of soul:
E'en in the eternal stars
Dim perturbations rise,
And all the searchers' search
Does not exhaust the skies;
He who has framed and brought us hither
Holds in His hands the whence and whither.

"He in His science plans
What no known laws foretell:
The wandering fires, and fixed,
Alike are miracle;
The common death of all,
The life renew'd above,
Are both within the scheme
Of that all-circling love;
The seeming chance that cast us hither
Accomplishes His whence and whither.

"Then though the sun goes up
His beaten, azure way,
God may fulfil His thought,
And bless His world to-day;
Beside the law of things
The law of mind enthroned,
And for the hope of all,
Reveal Himself in One;
Himself the way that leads us thither,
The All-in-all, the Whence and Whither."

There is no explanation that can satisfy the intellect and the heart of man but that which supposes a living, acting vitality springing from the fountains of life operating in all we see around us. Not law, but God, is the prime mover of all. As the Psalmist has it, "Thou visitest the earth and waterest it. Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water. Thou preparest them corn when

Thou hast so provided for it. Thou makest it soft with showers. Thou blestest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness, and Thy paths drop fatness." Thus far the classes of persons who are "without God in the world." Of course, there are many others that might be described did time suffice, which it does not, and we may, therefore, pass on to our second division.

II. What the being "without God in the world" involves.

In dealing with this subject I shall, perhaps, have to speak more respecting my own experience than I care to do, but, as I before remarked, it is necessary under the circumstances.

1. There is darkness of the intellect, and hence the doubts, perplexities, fears and misgivings arising therefrom. The state of mind of the unbeliever is one of the most lamentable character. It is full of painful uncertainty and doubt, with frequent anxious desire to have the problems solved that ever and anon press, if not on his intellect, at least upon his heart. Probably no human being can escape the terrible questions which will sometimes—in his moments of quietude and repose, in the hour of fearful trial and sorrow, in the day when temptation weighs down the soul, and when black clouds seem to envelope his entire inmost self in their dark folds—rise up and demand to be answered. Is there a God? and if so, what relationship do I sustain to Him? Am I a responsible being? What will be my fate after death? Are any of the great religions true, and if so, which? What, after all, if Christianity should be from God, and a fearful risk to be incurred by its rejection. Now, I speak from experience when I say that no unbelief can altogether smother such questions as these, no scepticism shut them out, no ridicule stifle them, and no arguments entirely dispel them. You may drive them away for

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a time, but back they will come again unbidden, in moments when they were to be little expected, and still less desired. They will rush into the soul with such tremendous force that all else will sink into abeyance before their terrible power, and their persistent demand to be answered. Dr. Sears, in his most admirable book on Regeneration, very truly remarks on this subject: "Even the hardest unbelief has those doubts and misgivings which come from the angel-voices that will not quite be driven out, or from the Divine Word that shineth in the darkness, though the darkness comprehendeth it not. Those who thought they had convinced themselves that the eternal Past and the eternal Future were regions of blank nothingness, and the questions Whence? and Whither? no other than if you shouted into a chasm, have found that some new experience opened unknown depths within them, and brought new faculties into exercise, and then, beyond the chasm, the Delectable Mountains rise clearly on the sight. Unbelief is seldom satisfied with its creed of denials, so that through its regions of desolation the pilgrim often travels to the most unshaken ground of his faith? How could this be, unless a spiritual world were already acting upon his spiritual nature? How could the spiritual faculties awake, whether they would or no, and give out the Memnon sounds, unless smitten with beams from other worlds, and made responsive to unearthly melodies? If the light comes not to bless and to save, it will come at awful intervals, like flashes of lightning at midnight, to make the darkness visible. Perhaps there is not a more significant passage in religious literature than the suppressed passage of Mr. Hume, where he describes the influence of his speculations. He surveys the habitation which, with infinite logical skill, he has builded about him, and he starts with horror at sight of the gloomy and

vacant chambers: 'I am astonished and affrighted at the forlorn solitude in which I am placed by my philosophy. When I look about I see on every side dispute, contradiction, and distraction. When I turn my eyes inward I find nothing but doubt and ignorance. Where am I, and what? From what causes do I derive existence, and to what condition do I return? I am confounded with these questions, and I begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, envircined in the deepest darkness.' The desolation and the emptiness are seen and felt, but they could not have been except in contrast with a light too early lost, or by some star not yet gone down in the sky."

The aspiration after God, the tendency to worship, and the desire to live again are so strong in most men's minds that in their toils and troubles they feel inclined to cry out:

Great God! I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn,
So that, standing on some pleasant lea,
I might have glimpses that would make me less forlorn.

In hours of darkness, when cares and sorrows overwhelm the soul, and dire misfortunes hem us in on every hand—when black clouds gather around us, and no light is visible—when friends prove false, and long-trusted companions treacherous—when circumstances seem to be in a company against us, and all hope has fled, then there rushes into the soul the tendency to cry to God for help. As Mrs. Brown- ing has it—

"There is no God, the foolish saith,
But none there is no sorrow,
And nature oft the cry of faith
In bitter need will borrow;
Eyes which the preacher could not school,
By wayside graves are raised,
And lips said, God be pitiful,
That ne'er said, God be praised."

Yet with all this there comes up before the mind of the sceptic the cold materialistic philosophy of the age, the doubt of God and immortality weighs down his soul, he becomes perplexed with uncertainty and indecision, and a most painful state of mind is the result. Happiness can have no place where such a condition prevails, and peace—true, genuine peace—must remain a thing far apart. No man knows better what this state of mind is than I do, having had many years' bitter experience of the doubts and uncertainties which it involves. To be, as the poet says,

"Haunted for ever by the Eternal Mind,"

and yet not to feel able to recognize the Divine in Nature and the spiritual in man, is a condition which is easier felt than described. Gleams of light occasionally shooting through the dense gloom—serving only to make the darkness afterwards more intense—a few drops of rain on the parched and dried-up ground, the sight of food to the hungry, or water placed before the eyes as though to mock the vision of him who is dying of thirst, are similes which but faintly shadow forth the state of mind of the sceptic.

"Oh, how this tyrant doubt torments my breast!
My thoughts, like birds who, frightened from their nest,
Around the place where all was hushed before
Flutter and hardly nestle any more."

2. To be "without God in the world" is to lack a basis for the moral law. This may seem, perhaps, an extreme statement to make, but it is nevertheless, I think, perfectly true. Ethical codes there have been, no doubt, in abundance which did not recognize God, but they seem to me to lack a sound and solid basis. This was a difficulty that I had to contend with in my own mind during the time that I was a sceptic. The utilitarian philosophy generally

accepted by the Secularists I always looked upon with a great deal of abhorrence, to say nothing of the fact that it makes the morality of an act depend upon results which cannot be known until the act itself has been performed, and, therefore, is utterly useless at the moment when it is needed. I could never bring myself to believe that morality was a shifting thing of policy, to be changed as circumstances should demand. No, I said to myself—and frequently to others—there must be such a thing as absolute morality, which is unchangeable through all time, in all conditions, and under all circumstances. It must have its basis somewhere, though I cannot very clearly see where; and I could not make the discovery, nor can any unbeliever in God make it to-day. Morality is not a thing of expediency or arrangement on the part of Governments or social circles, but is as absolute as physical law. The words *ought* and *ought not* exist in every language, and have been used by all races of men. And their value depends upon the existence of some law of right and wrong, which is vaguely shadowed forth even amongst savages, expressed in what men call conscience, and whose basis is God. I cannot conceive that such words can have any meaning if morality be simply a matter of social arrangement. Down deep in human nature there is that something which men call conscience, and which, though like every other faculty, it may be misdirected by false education, yet still remains an inward monitor, prompting, however faintly, to right, and dissuading, however feebly, from wrong. We are surrounded on all hands by evil, we live in a world full of evil, we move amongst men and women who, if they do not violate openly the moral law by stealing or committing murder, are yet never backward to cheat in a fashionable manner that is not only common, but likely to escape observation,

who gratify their own selfishness at the expense of their neighbours' comforts, and who circulate slanderous and false rumours respecting those whom they ought to defend; and we have no hesitation in condemning all this as wrong. Even the people who practise it admit it to be wrong. Well, now, whence came the knowledge that such conduct is not right? Clearly from some moral law implanted in human nature, which could only have originated with a moral Governor. Speaking the other day with a gentleman, an Atheist, whom I have known for some years, he said to me: "Nature cannot be under the control of a wise and benevolent Being, because we are surrounded by most frightful evils. Why, on every hand we see so much pain and suffering that we can hardly help weeping over it, and moral wrong appears to prevail throughout nature." I replied: "But if moral wrong prevails throughout nature, pray tell me whence you obtain the faculty which leads you to pronounce that to be wrong by which you are so thickly beset on every hand? It could not have sprung from evolution, because, if it had, it must have been in harmony with the conditions which gave it birth. Now, this conscience of yours is utterly out of harmony with the conditions by which it is surrounded, and hence the pain you experience at what you call moral wrong. Thus, amidst all this flood of immorality, you stand conspicuously forth as a moral agent, with moral perceptions, moral desires, and a moral judgment." I need hardly say my friend had no answer to give. The moral law must have God for its basis, and he who is without God is destitute of a definite guide in this respect. Do not misunderstand me here. I do not mean that Atheists, and unbelievers in general, are immoral, because I know great numbers who are not; but I mean that they are destitute of a perfect moral law, and are com-

pelled in their philosophy to find a substitute in such a wretched, shifting, policy-mongering thing as Utilitarianism.

3. The being without God tends to the destruction of hope, and of the belief in the ultimate triumph of good. I do not see upon what ground an Atheist predicts that ultimately all things are to be set right. He quotes glibly enough the old adage, *Magna est veritas, et prevalebit*, but upon what ground it is very difficult to say. Why must truth ultimately prevail if there be no God of Truth? Is it not just as likely that error may not go on increasing, and ultimately triumph? "There is a good time coming" is asserted even by Atheists with a confidence that appears to me utterly unwarrantable. How do you know, or, rather, how does the Atheist know, that there is any good time coming? May not the times grow worse and worse? It is difficult to see upon what ground this good time is believed in, unless there be a moral Governor. I have frequently heard Atheists repeat, with great gusto, the lines—

"For right shall yet come uppermost,
And justice shall be done."

And I have often felt inclined to ask the question, even when I myself was a sceptic, upon what ground it was believed that this would occur? Might not the world go on getting worse and worse until injustice should universally prevail, and right be trampled out of existence? The Christian, of course, can repeat these lines in firm confidence that the state of things they depict will come to pass, because he believes in a God of Justice and of Right. And this belief is the only real and substantial ground of hope. Hence the Apostle, in the text, associates hope with God in the description that he gives of the persons therein referred to, as "having no hope, and without God in the world."

4. To be without God in the world is to deprive the spiritual nature of its necessary aliment. That man has a spiritual nature is certain. In every age the aspirations of mankind have pointed to the supernatural. The hopes, and fears, and longings of humanity have ever been directed towards the existence of a Supreme Being. In all times, and under every variety of circumstances, men have engaged in devotional exercises. Polytheism, Pantheism, and even Idolatry, testify to the necessity for some kind of worship. And, in the absence of all other objects, man has, in his depravity, indulged in self-worship. "The man who has nothing else above him," remarks Dr. Vaughan, "has self: that ugliest, most obscene of deities—Belial, and Mammon, and Beelzebub in one. Self is the deity of millions; and its worship is as vile, as brutalising as ever were the rites of Chemosh, or Milcomb, or Ashtaroth. In general, even fallen man has something besides himself above him; even where self presides in the worship, it is rather as priest than idol." Worship of some kind or other may be said to be next to universal, which, of itself, is strong and conclusive evidence in favour of the truth of religion. In the absence of God, men worship the material universe either as a whole or in its various parts, or they deify vague abstractions. During the time that I was an unbeliever I wrote the following hymn, which still appears in Secular hymn-books and is sung in Secular halls. It will serve to show you the tendency in the mind of a sceptic to some kind of worship. It runs thus:—

"They tell us that we worship not,
Nor sing sweet songs of praise,
That love Divine is not our lot
In these cold modern days;
That piety's calm, peaceful state
We banish from the earth:

WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD.

They know not that we venerate
 Whate'er we see of worth:
 The singing of the birds on high,
 The rippling of the stream,
 The sparkling stars in yon bright sky,
 The sunlight's merry gleam,
 The ocean's wide and watery main,
 The lightning's vivid flash,
 The sweet and gentle showers of rain,
 The awful thunder's crash;
 The trees and flowers that deck the land,
 The soft and grassy mead,
 The firm-set earth on which we stand,
 Are worshipful indeed.
 We venerate great Nature's plan,
 And worship at her shrine,
 While goodness, truth, and love in man,
 We hold to be divine."

The true sentiment of worship is here, but not the true object; in fact, there can be no proper object of worship in the absence of God, and, therefore, those who are without God starve their spiritual nature by attempting to feed it on the chaff from which the corn has been extracted. Auguste Comte was a sufficiently shrewd observer of human nature to discover that some kind of worship was essential to the success of his system, and, there being no God, according to his idea, he instituted, in the Positive Philosophy, the worship of humanity in the abstract. And this queer thing is worshipped by his disciples to-day. They have churches or meeting-places, they have priests and rituals, and all the semblances of religion, but no God; so they meet on Sunday to preach and pay their devotions to humanity in the abstract. Now, if you ask me what humanity in the abstract is, I candidly confess I don't know. Humanity in the concrete I know something of, and it is frequently very bad, certainly not fit to be worshipped; but, as to humanity in the abstract, it is too pure an abstraction for my humanity to comprehend. One thing is quite clear

which is, that they who are "without God in the world" have no proper object of worship, cannot consistently pray or sing praises, and must, therefore, starve the spiritual part of their nature.

5. To be "without God in the world" is to be without any sort of consolation in that most terrible of all trials when those near and dear to us are snatched away by death. Atheistic philosophy can neither penetrate the mysterious character of dissolution, nor afford the smallest possible consolation when it occurs. The views that I myself held on the subject of death whilst I was connected with the Secularists may be gathered from an article containing a sketch of the career of Robert Brough, which I wrote in the *Players*—a literary and dramatic journal edited by myself—on July 7, 1860. The following extract will show the state of my mind at that time on this important question:—

"It is one of those mysteries that perplex philosophy and puzzle the thinker, that when a man is just emerging from life's green spring into a career of usefulness—forming associations that link his soul to those of other kindred spirits crossing his path on the highway of life—and building up a reputation for himself among the generations of men, a blow is struck by the grim messenger from the land of shades, and he, when a thousand reasons could be given why he should remain with us, is hurried away irresistibly into the sad abodes of death.

"The fact stares us in the face—the explanation is a riddle which even *Œdipus* would be incompetent to solve. We laugh, rejoice, and weep; take our ease on soft couches, or wear ourselves out with the labour and turmoil of business; the end always the same—we fade away into oblivion, and are forgotten.

"To-day we frolic in the rosy bloom
Of jocund youth—the morrow knells us to the tomb.

"A dark, impenetrable curtain surrounds us—we are ever moving towards its gloomy shades. We pass behind it frequently when our prospects here seem brightest. Friends may mourn us, relatives may lament our loss, companions may call to us ; but we neither return nor answer. From behind that curtain no voice issueth—not even the gentle whisperings of a sigh—there cometh forth nothing but a deep and profound silence, the very stillness of which is terribly awful. Each man, as he shuffles off this mortal coil, leaves behind him but a mass of senseless earth—his feelings, his reason, his love, his genius—alas ! where are they ? He who yesterday lit up mirth in a whole assembly by his radiant smile, or moved masses by his words of fire, has to-day become the sport of every wind—food for the meanest of creatures. His form has gone—

"To mix forever with the elements,
To be a brother to the insensible rock
And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain
Turns with his share and treads upon.

"Very mysterious all this. We demand of the Universe an explanation of the problem, and the only reply we obtain is, all things are mutable, man amongst the rest. But why ?—Creation returns no answer. Her myriads of stars, and millions of forms of organic and inorganic things, present the problem ; but the key to its solution they withhold."

Now, can there be anything more cold and cheerless than this dismal view of death ? It is enough to wither the loving, trusting heart, and to convert it into stone. The whole aspect of the scene is terrible ; friends are severed from you by a sudden stroke, taking a portion of your very

self away, and you know not what has become of them, except that they are gone forever, and you can never see them more. You may weep until your tears are exhausted and can no longer flow, and your whole soul is stricken down with grief, but, alas! there is no hope, all is gloom and despair, dark as night. In a recent publication I gave the following description of an Atheist, as he sits by the bedside of a loved one that is passing away from earth:—

“The believer in annihilation must be a pitiable object sitting at the death-bed of his wife or daughter. He beholds the last flickering of the lamp of life, and sees his loved one fading away before his eyes—all that upon which his affections are placed is passing from hence into oblivion, to be seen no more—going, in fact, into nothingness, similar to that which existed before birth—as Seneca has it:—

“The dead and the unborn are both the same,
We all to nothing go, from nothing came.

“His heart-strings are wrung with grief. He clasps the dying one to his bosom; but she is not conscious of his embrace. He presses hot kisses upon her cheeks, which are cold as marble now: he looks into her eyes, all light has faded from them, and they see no more; every trace of expression has gone from her features, and there is nothing left but the clay-cold corpse. His brain is maddened with grief; he is alone in the world. There is a vacancy in his heart which can never again be filled. Black clouds hover around him, and a blacker abyss still is behind the clouds. There is dark midnight, with never a star. All beauty has passed from earth. The deep gloom is terrible to contemplate. Where is consolation to be found? Alas! nowhere. Science says the thing was in-

evitable, philosophy prates about controlling one's feelings, and being a man—pshaw! 'tis because he is a man that he feels the grief so keenly. And how is he to be consoled? Why, his loved one, who is gone, will come up again in violets and primroses and beautiful flowers! Is this consolation for a broken-hearted man? I tell you 'tis the veriest mockery that has ever been heard of. Science, philosophy, secularism, all are powerless in such cases—they cannot remove the load of grief that weighs the sufferer down. If he goes into the darkness, the gloom harmonizes with his feelings, and makes his sorrow the deeper; if he walks in the sunshine, the brightness appears to mock his sufferings. Birds sing not to cheer him, but to taunt him with their merrymaking, and to draw attention to the contrast between themselves and him; and flowers bloom but to make light of his grief. No hope, no consolation can there be; for is not all that he cared for on earth gone, and no power can bring it back for ever?"

But, in the presence of the Gospel all becomes clear. There shines a light across the dreary path of the mourner, with a radiance that dispels all darkness, and lifts up the soul in holy joy to God. It beams in hope and consolation from the words of Him who broke the fetters of the tomb, conquered death, and opened up the way to eternal happiness for men. To shew you the change in my own feelings, I give you the words which I wrote in my diary in 1875, when my father was snatched from me by death. They present a striking and cheerful contrast to what I had penned fifteen years before. I now remark:—
"As I gazed on the inanimate clay that had once encased the active spirit of my father, I thought of the superiority of the views of those who believe in a future life over the cold, dismal, cheerless creed of materialism, which recog-

nizes no meeting again when once death has snapped the thread of earthly life, and I brushed away my tears, lifted up my heart to God, and exclaimed—

“Death’s arrows, like the shuttle, flee,
And dark howe’er life’s night may be,
Beyond the grave I’ll meet with thee.”

“Then came to my mind the nobler consolation still, grandest of truths ever put into human words, source of brightest comfort to millions of our race, when nothing else could cheer them: ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.’ Ay, thought I, this is worth all the philosophy that was ever written, and all the science to which even the fertile womb of the future can give birth.”

6. There is another aspect of this question of death which is far more important, and in relation to which the being without God places one in a fearful position. It is that of the consideration of his own fate in the hereafter. Now, suppose there is no God, then at death we cease to be, and become annihilated, than which I can conceive nothing more dreadful to contemplate. It is not easy to realize annihilation—in fact, it is next to impossible—because you can hardly conceive of yourself as non-existent; but as far as it can be realized, it is a very terrible thought, and fearful to contemplate. Many and many a time have I tried to depict to myself the passing from existence into blank nothingness, and have always shrunk back appalled from the view thus conjured up before my imagination. To cease to be is, perhaps, the most fearful lot that a man can conceive of as happening to himself. “It is,” says Sir Thomas Brown, “the heaviest stone that melancholy can throw at a man to tell him that he is at the end of his being” It is difficult to conceive why we should labour, and struggle, and

toil to store up wisdom, acquire knowledge, cultivate affection, overcome temptation, crush out and subdue selfishness, and strive to elevate and purify, not our words and actions simply, for that might be beneficial to society, but our inmost thoughts and feelings, lying in the deepest recesses of our nature, if there be no hereafter. In a few short years our material organizations will be relinquished, and given back to the great mass from which they came, the atoms of which they were composed to enter into new forms and combinations; and our whole mental being, love, wisdom, knowledge, to be blown away as so much empty vapour, and our consciousness to be blotted out. If annihilation be the end of our career, then the earth is a charnel house, and nature one huge funeral pall. Well might a poet exclaim:—

“What is the bigot’s torch, the tyrant’s chain?
 I smile on death if heavenward hope remain!
 But if the warring winds of Nature’s strife
 Be all the faithless charter of my life;
 If chance awak’d—inexorable power—
 This frail and feverish being of an hour;
 Doomed o’er the world’s precarious scene to sweep,
 Swift as the tempest travels o’er the deep;
 To know delight but by her parting smile,
 And toil, and wish, and weep a little while,—
 Then melt, ye elements, that formed in vain
 This troubled pulse and visionary brain;
 Fade ye wild flowers, memorials of my doom,
 And sink, ye stars, that light me to the tomb!”

The whole soul shudders with horror at the gloom which thus hangs over the entire face of nature. In all ages men have believed in a future life, because their deepest instincts and strongest aspirations pointed thitherward in a manner which was not to be mistaken. “If,” said the late W. J. Fox, “Heaven be indeed a dream, it is one of nature’s dreams, whose visions are prophecies.”

Then, supposing that there is a future life, as there most unquestionably is, how fearful is the condition of those who are "without God in the world." I stay not here to discuss the innocence or guilt of what is called honest doubt, or how far any man is to be held responsible before the bar of God for not believing differently to what he does. These are matters which I prefer to leave, at least, on the present occasion. I suppose all will admit that if there be a hereafter, some sort of preparation for it is important. And what that preparation should be can be learned nowhere, but from the record that reveals to us the future life and its conditions. You might prefer to have it otherwise, but that will, in no sense, alter the fact. There it is, and it cannot be set aside. A great deal of nonsense is talked about the best preparation for the hereafter being the doing our duty here. No doubt, but what duty? The whole thing hinges on that. You see, the duty of man as taught by sceptics and the duty of man as laid down in the New Testament are not quite the same, and it can hardly be consistently maintained that to practise the former is the sole preparation required for a state only revealed by the latter. Besides, the question which is so frequently put, and which I have myself asked before now, Why should the Atheist fear to die? altogether mistakes the nature and conditions of the future life. We can only enter there into the place or state in accord with the character and condition which we have brought about in ourselves while here. Heaven is for those who not simply believe in God, but who love God, and those who do not belong to this class would, even if they gained admission to its precincts, hardly relish its pure and celestial joys.

In conclusion I may just say that, as far as I can see,

there is no remedy for this being "without God in the world" but in Jesus Christ. "In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," and in Him alone can a true conception of God be formed. The people referred to by the apostle as being "without God in the world" were those who were out of Christ, and the description there met with is as applicable to the people of this day as to those of that time. Atheism and Pantheism do not, perhaps, remove one further from God than certain forms of Theism which are to-day extremely popular. To reject Christ is to be without God in the world, for there is no way to God but through Him "who is the brightness of God's Glory and the express image of His Person." You may pile up systems upon systems of philosophy, you may invent great schemes for regenerating mankind, you may penetrate into nature's inmost recesses and wring from her secrets hid from the beginning of the world, you may propound schemes of society for the perfection of social order, and ethical codes for the reformation of conduct; all these are good in their way, but they will not save the soul, because they are incapable of regenerating the inner man. Erect what splendid superstructures you please, that you think will be available for the benefit of society, but take care that their basis is sound, or the whole edifice will fall, and your work come to nought. Remember the words of St. Paul, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

JESUS, THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life."—JOHN xiv. 6.

CHRISTIANITY is a great fact. Whether true or false, it is the most important religion which exists to-day. In point of numbers it, perhaps, may not compare with Buddhism; but, in the influence it exercises over the world, it is a thousand times greater than all other religions put together. It includes within its ranks the greatest minds that the world has ever seen, holds undivided sway over all civilized nations, and is the foundation of the most perfect forms of government in existence.

Now, taking it simply as a fact, this religion has to be accounted for. When, about five years ago, I began to investigate carefully the claims of Christianity, the importance of this question was forcibly impressed upon my mind. I asked myself what sort of explanation I had to give of the origin and progress of this great system of faith. I had frequently spoken about the natural causes which conduced to the establishment of Christianity in the early ages; but it now occurred to me that this was a point to which I had not given sufficient consideration, and upon which, therefore, I had not arrived at any very satisfactory con-

clusion. And I venture to say that my position then was just that of every Freethinker to-day. In truth, as a rule, this question is completely shirked by sceptical teachers. It is very difficult, indeed, to get them to face it. Since I have become a Christian I have often tried to impress the importance of it upon their attention, but usually without effect. I have generally been told by them that it is a matter of no moment, and that they are not called upon to explain the origin of this or any other religion. John Stuart Mill seems to have thought otherwise. He remarks: "For, whatever opinion a person may adopt on any subject that admits of controversy, his assurance, if he be a cautious thinker, cannot be complete unless he is able to account for the existence of the opposite opinion. To ascribe it to the weakness of the human understanding is an explanation which cannot be sufficient for such a thinker; for he will be slow to assume that he has himself a less share of that infirmity than the rest of mankind, and that error is more likely to be on the other side than on his own." If Christianity had a natural origin, and if all the influences that have conduced to its success were of a natural character, we have a right to be informed what kind of agencies they were that conduced to bring it into existence and establish so extraordinary a system. And this is just the point upon which we shall seek in vain for any information. The celebrated historian, Gibbon, 'tis true, gives five reasons for the rapid spread of Christianity by natural causes; but these are utterly futile to explain the fact. Indeed, they look as though they had their origin in the desperation of a man struggling with a difficulty which he could not surmount.

It must ever be borne in mind, in the consideration of this question, that Christianity presents features which are utterly unlike those to be met with in any other system.

Let a man take up the New Testament as he would another book, and, on looking into it, he will be struck with the peculiarity of the record, and the points in which it differs from any other volume that he has ever looked into. He will find depicted there a character, real or ideal, utterly unlike anything to be found elsewhere. There are miracles recorded in abundance, and supernatural acts are ascribed to this Being, but what far excels all these is the marvellous perfection displayed in His character, and the divine life that He led. Even if the miracles were proved to be false, and the supernatural halo that continually surrounded Him were shown to be a mythological accumulation of after ages, or a pure invention of the time, still that would in no sense explain away the life of the Being depicted. The character of Christ is perfect, and that perfection has to be accounted for. To say that it was fictitious in no way gets out of the difficulty; for that is only to shift the ground from the real to the ideal, leaving us still in the dark as to how the invention came. For, if Christ be simply an ideal picture, the man who sketched it will be as difficult to account for as the Being Himself, on the supposition that it is real. The four memoirs in which the character is portrayed are totally unlike biographies in general; they are, in fact, simply dramatic sketches—nothing more. There is no word of eulogy bestowed upon the marvellous Being whose life is portrayed. Mighty deeds, such as had never been seen before in the history of the world, are ascribed to Him, and acts unparalleled in grandeur and power are recorded without one word of comment. The personage described is simply placed before you; you hear His conversation, you see His miracles, you are an eye-witness of the marvellous supernatural power that He displays, and you must form your own opinion respecting Him. His biographers have

nothing to tell but the simple, plain story of His life and death. Here is brought at once before you the only perfect Being who has appeared in the history of the world ; and be the character real or ideal, we demand to know how it originated, and particularly how it has come to exercise the mighty influence over the world that it has, an influence which is far larger than we are accustomed to imagine. When I began to look into this question, I was particularly struck with a fact which had previously entirely escaped my observation, that Christianity has diffused itself so thoroughly throughout society, has permeated so effectually every portion of our daily life, that we are apt to overlook the blessings that we have received from it. Our laws have been founded on it, our customs have been largely moulded by it, our civilization originated in it, we owe to it our freedom, and it has given shape to the entire structure of modern society ; and the explanation of this it is we want to find. Judging by my experience, which has been large and varied, and extends to both sides of the question, I hold that this is to be discovered nowhere but in the supposition that Christianity is true, and its origin supernatural.

Now, in glancing at Christianity impartially, as we would do at any other system of religion or philosophy, there is one fact which stares us in the face, standing out as it does most conspicuously, and which cannot fail to impress itself upon our attention. The fact to which I refer is this, that Christ comes before us in an entirely different manner to that in which any ancient teacher presents himself. There is no possibility of making a comparison between Him and the great men of the past, whose names are held in a certain amount of veneration at the present time, in consequence of the mighty thoughts which they gave to the world. It

is fashionable now-a-days to compare Christ with Socrates, with Plato, with Buddha, and even with Confucius, but the student of the lives of these men will see that such a comparison is altogether out of the question. The claims which Jesus made, and the pretensions He put forth, were of such a character as to isolate Him entirely from the rest of the race. I say nothing here of whether the claims were substantiated or not, for at the present moment that is no part of the question under consideration, but certain it is that He assumed a power, and claimed for Himself attributes which we do not find centred in any other teacher, either in ancient or modern times. And perhaps no better proof of this could be found than the fact that, if you were to put His language into the mouth of any one of these great teachers of antiquity, it would appear utterly out of place, and could not fail, in fact, to provoke ridicule. Plato, "the divine Plato," as he has been sometimes called, would never have dreamed of speaking to his disciples in language such as that which was continually used by Jesus Christ. Socrates, who stands pre-eminently high among ancient moralists, however perfect his teachings, never arrogated to himself the moral perfection which we find continually claimed by Jesus. Buddha taught a system of morals and religion which embraces to-day a larger number of worshippers than Christianity itself, but his own part in the system, beyond that of being its originator, is exceedingly small; and as to Confucius, why, we really know so little of him that it is hardly worth discussing his peculiarities. He probably inculcated a few great moral precepts, coupled with very much of a highly objectionable character, but in no case did he himself lay claim to anything more than ordinary natural knowledge.

The wide difference between Christianity and all other

systems will be seen in the fact, that in the whole of the latter there is a possibility of drawing a line of demarcation between the teacher and his teachings. You may remove Socrates from his ethics, Plato from his philosophy, Buddha from his religion, and Mahomet from his so-called revelation, without, in the smallest possible degree, affecting the systems thus severed from their originators. What I mean is that Buddhism and Mahometanism would remain quite as perfect as they are, even though Buddha and Mahomet should be proved never to have existed; just as the writings of Shakespeare would be equally valuable if Shakespeare himself were demonstrated to be, as some maintain he really was, a mythical character. But with Christianity it is utterly impossible to adopt this course. If you remove Christ from his religion, you have nothing left. Christianity, in fact, is Christ, not His teachings merely, but Himself. His whole life and being are so thoroughly incorporated with the religion which He taught that the one has become a part and parcel of the other. The cause of this is to be found in the peculiar character of His teachings, and in that peculiarity He is distinguished from every other man that ever lived in the world's history. Even the Old Testament prophets, in whose footsteps he might naturally be supposed, to some extent, to have walked, never issued their mandates in the terms and tones employed by Him. With them the whole burden of their message was, "Thus saith the Lord," but with Christ it was "I say unto you." And this language He employed when sometimes drawing a distinction between His own teaching and the teaching of the past, in a manner that must necessarily have brought upon Himself the charge of blasphemy on the part of His countrymen. For when He said, "It hath been said" so and so, "but I say unto you" some-

thing different, the "hath been said" referred, not unfrequently, to that very law which was given amidst the thunder and smoke of Sinai from God Himself. And here, therefore, He at once, in the plainest possible terms, asserted the power on His own part to repeal the code thus supernaturally given. His whole demeanour was that of a Being whose power was from Himself, and from Himself alone. In the miracles which He wrought, we do not find Him, like the Old Testament worthies, praying to God for help; He performed them from a power which was evidently centered in His own Being. He does not seem to depend on another, even though that other be God; but to heal diseases, control the forces of nature, and forgive sin equally from Himself. His moral teaching, acknowledged even by sceptics to be the most perfect system of ethics that the world has seen, He lives out in His life; and on no single occasion do we find Him admitting that He falls short of its most perfect principles. He declares that all men are sinners, yet Himself confesses to none; but, on the contrary, indirectly repudiates being a sinner. All this is so utterly unlike anything that we find in connection with any other man that the world has seen, that we are at once startled, if not with the supernatural character of the Being here brought before us, at least with the unique nature of His pretensions. In His public teaching, too, He invariably preaches Himself, and declares that the sum and substance of all religion is belief in Him, and dependence upon Him. He speaks of Himself as "The Light of the World," "The Bread of Life," "The Living Bread which came down from Heaven," the one "Good Shepherd," the very "Door of the Sheepfold," and the only means of approach to God. He claims to raise Himself from death by His own power, to be able to give the living water of the Spirit, and to be "the

Resurrection and the Life," and the Judge of the World. He asked men to trust in Him as in God, to believe in Him as in God, to honour Him as they honour God. The commandments that He desires men to keep are His own, and He demands that the love bestowed upon Him shall be greater than that given to father, or mother, or husband, or wife, or the nearest and dearest blood relations. He will accept no devotion short of that of the whole heart and soul. To love Him is to love God. And, on one distinct and memorable occasion, He declared that those who had seen Him had seen the Father. Passages proving the truth of these facts might be quoted without end; but they are so familiar to every reader of the Scriptures, that it is unnecessary to extend them. They all go to show, however, that the claims and pretensions here made are perfectly unique; we meet with them nowhere else, we do not expect to find them elsewhere, and should be terribly startled if we came across them in connection with any other being.

What, then, is to be said of all this? It does not, of course, follow that Christianity is true because Christ laid claim to these marvellous supernatural powers; but, then, it does follow that His character is entirely unique in the history of the world, and as such it will have to be judged. Now, as far as I can see, there are but three suppositions possible. First, Jesus may have been a rank impostor, laying claim to attributes which He knew He did not possess, and deceiving the people, therefore, by arrogating to Himself an authority to which He had no legitimate claim. Or, secondly, He may have been an enthusiast, believing that He was endowed with supernatural powers, which He did not possess, and acting throughout life, therefore, in the spirit of a wild fanaticism, proclaiming Himself the Jewish Messiah, and something more, from a sincere enough feel-

ing on His part, but one born of a deep and terrible delusion. Or, thirdly, His claims may have been substantiated, and His self-assertion justifiable; and, in that case, Christianity is true. I have not, of course, time here to discuss at length these suppositions; but a few words will, I think, suffice to show you that the two first are utterly untenable. When I began to look carefully and seriously into this question, I saw that it was quite impossible to rank Christ with impostors. For, in the first place, His claims stood the test of that age, and have stood the test of eighteen centuries since, which it is difficult to conceive could happen to an impostor; and, in the next place, His whole conduct and character bespeak a genuineness about which there can be no mistake. Impostors always act for their own temporal advantage, in some form or other, in the direction of wealth, or fame, or power, or the gratification of some leading propensity. With Jesus, however, there was the most thorough and entire disinterestedness that the world has ever seen. Selfishness in His religion was the greatest of all crimes, and selfishness was utterly absent from His life and character. Those who joined Him He distinctly told to expect nothing but persecution, and obloquy, and reproach, and suffering, and tribulation. For Himself, this was His lot through life, chosen voluntarily by Him at every stage of His career, and crowned at last with a cruel death, foreseen by Himself from the very beginning. Nor is the theory that He was an enthusiast much more reasonable, because any one who reads the history of enthusiasts, or studies human nature in its various phases, will see that an enthusiast is always the outcome of the age in which he appears. Had Jesus been an enthusiast, His enthusiasm must have been essentially Jewish. Had He believed Himself the long-promised Messiah which that

people were expecting. He would, as a matter of course, have discovered in Himself the very characteristics which were being looked for in the person who was to come. He would have assumed temporal power, would have proclaimed Himself a King, and would have endeavoured to fulfil, as far as He could, all the Jewish expectations respecting Him. But this is exactly what He does not do. He sets aside the authority of the Mosaic law, and gives in its place a universal moral code, which would be repugnant alike to Roman and to Jew. He breaks down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, and proclaims principles of love and benevolence as wide as the universe, and embracing all humanity. He resides occasionally with the Samaritans, with whom the Jews were at bitter enmity, cures their sick, and selects one of that people as the hero of one of His most beautiful parables, which has made the phrase "the Good Samaritan" synonymous with a kind, benevolent and warm-hearted man in all civilized countries up to the present day. He offends continually the prejudices of His race, and on no single occasion do we find Him pandering to Jewish ideas. In a word, He rises in His sublimity completely out of Judaism, and becomes, not the representative man of a race, but the typical man of the whole human family. His teachings were of the plainest possible character; His religion of a most beneficent nature, and His knowledge of humanity marvellously great. In His ordinary demeanour He is always calm; seldom is His language strong, and never is there mixed up with it any excitement. He declares that force and coercion are to play no part in the promulgation of His religion; but that they who use the sword shall perish by the sword. He resents no personal injury inflicted on Himself, and whenever He condemns others it is always in reference to public crimes or secret

sins, hidden to ordinary eyes behind a veil of hypocrisy. He rebukes His disciples for asking to be allowed to call fire from heaven to consume their opponents, and condemns their conduct in forbidding persons to cast out devils in His name, who had not formally joined them. In a word, He practises a toleration utterly opposed to Jewish prejudices. The calmness of manner which he invariably displays is quite incompatible with fanaticism. Read that magnificent prayer still called the Lord's Prayer, and tell me whether you think it could have been composed by a madman. The supposition is too improbable to be worth discussing. Jesus knows, too, from the first what will be the end of His mission personally to Himself, because He continually foretells His death, and what to us is far more important, foretells His resurrection from the dead. Judged of from any point of view, He could not, by any stretch of imagination, be conceived to have been an enthusiast. There is, therefore, but one other conclusion possible—namely, that the claims that He put forward were genuine, and His doctrines true.

Nor is the supposition that He was either an impostor or a madman one that is generally accepted even among sceptics. What the exact view is that they entertain about Him is sometimes very difficult to make out, and, when discovered, it is never very consistent. I should at any time, myself, during my sceptical career, have maintained that Jesus was the greatest reformer and the most illustrious character that had ever appeared during the history of the world. I should have extolled His god-like life, admired the marvellous perfection of His character, and gone into raptures over the greater part of His moral teaching. All this I now see to be terribly inconsistent, because, taking into consideration His self-assertion, He must have been more than this, or less. Let us see, however, for a moment

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or two, what some of the greatest sceptics have thought of Him, and we shall find that men who profess to disbelieve entirely in His religion, and to look upon Him as a man destitute of any supernatural power, yet seem never to tire of lauding the beauty of His character. Spinoza, Jew first, and afterwards Pantheist—in the latter case an utter disbeliever in all revelation, and with, one might suppose, a prejudice against Christianity, brought over from his early Jewish education—thinks Him “the best and truest symbol of heavenly wisdom, or of ideal perfection.” Kant calls Him “the union between the human and the Divine.” Strauss, whose entire life was one continued attempt to pull down Christianity and reduce the whole thing to a system of mythology, speaks of Christ as the “highest object we can possibly imagine with respect to religion, the Being without whose presence in the mind perfect piety is impossible.” Napoleon I. remarks: “I know men, but Jesus Christ is not a man.” The flippant soul of Voltaire was overawed by the life and character of Christ, as may be seen from the article on Religion in his “Philosophical Dictionary.” John Stuart Mill, whom sceptics never tire of quoting, writes: “And whatever else may be taken away from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left, a unique figure, not more unlike all His precursors than all His followers, even those who had the direct benefit of His personal teaching. It is of no use to say that Christ, as exhibited in the Gospels, is not historical, and that we know not how much of what is admirable has been superadded by the tradition of His followers. The tradition of followers suffices to insert any number of marvels, and may have inserted all the miracles which He is reputed to have wrought. But who, among His disciples, or among their proselytes, was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of

imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee, as certainly not St. Paul, whose character and idiosyncrasies were of a totally different sort; still less the early Christian writers, in whom nothing is more evident than that the good which was in them was all derived, as they always professed that it was derived, from the higher source." Lecky, the historian of Rationalism, and himself a Rationalist, remarks: "It was reserved for Christianity to present to the world an ideal character which, through all the changes of eighteen centuries, has inspired the hearts of men with an impassioned love, and has shown itself capable of acting on all ages, nations, temperaments, and conditions; has not only been the highest pattern of virtue, but the highest incentive to its practice; and has exercised so deep an influence that it may be truly said that the simple record of three short years of active life has done more to regenerate and soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists." Renan, one of the most famous sceptical writers of this century, whose work is one of the ablest endeavours to strip Christianity of its supernatural element, thus speaks of Jesus: "Rest now in thy glory, noble initiator, thy work is completed, thy divinity is established; fear no more to see the edifice of thy efforts crumble through a flaw. Henceforth, beyond the reach of frailty, thou shalt be present from the height of thy divine peace in the infinite consequences of thy acts. At the price of a few hours of suffering, which have not even touched thy great soul, thou hast purchased the most complete immortality. For thousands of years the world will extol thee. Banner of our contradictions, thou wilt be the sign around which will be fought the fiercest battles. A thousand times more living, a thousand times more loved since thy death

than during the days of thy pilgrimage here below. Thou wilt become to such a degree the corner-stone of humanity, that to tear thy name from this world would be to shake it to its foundations. Between thee and God men will no longer distinguish. Complete conqueror of death, take possession of thy kingdom, whither, by the royal road thou hast traced, ages of adorers will follow thee." Strong language this, to come from a sceptic, that between Christ and God men would no longer distinguish, and that so interwoven with the life of men would the name of Jesus become, that to tear it away would be to shake humanity to its foundations. So say I, but with what consistency Renan could say it, it is difficult to imagine. Theodore Parker, the impassioned and brilliant Unitarian preacher, while rejecting miracles, and utterly denying the supernatural, thus reducing Christ to the condition of a man with no powers but such as belonged to His own human nature, yet did not hesitate to write :—

"Jesus, there is no dearer name than thine,
Which time has blazoned on his mighty scroll;
No wreaths, no garlands, ever did entwine
So fair a temple of so vast a soul.

"There every virtue set his triumph seal,
Wisdom conjoined with strength and radiant grace,
In a sweet copy heaven to reveal,
And stamp perfection on a mortal face.

"Once, on the earth, wert thou before men's eyes,
That did not half thy beauteous brightness see,
E'en as the emmet does not read the skies,
Nor our weak orbs look through immensity;
Once on the earth wert thou a living shrine,
Wherein conjoining dwelt the Good, the Lovely, the Divine."

Now what is to be said of all this? The position taken by these men is utterly untenable, because, if Jesus was the grand and beautiful character that they describe, then He

must have been much more, since there are the claims staring us in the face that He was continually making, and the self-assertion that runs throughout His whole teaching. My object in quoting them, however, is to show you what overwhelming evidence there is, sufficient to bring conviction even to sceptics themselves, that Jesus was neither an impostor nor a fanatic. The only other alternative is that He was all that He professed to be.

I confess that in the consideration of this question I met with considerable difficulties. My views of Christ underwent a gradual change from the time I began to carefully examine the subject, and I had to go up the scale as I had in early life gone down. As far as I can recollect, my first doubts when a young man and a Christian minister were on the subject of the Lord's divinity, and from that point I came to reject the Christian doctrines one by one, until, as you know, I merged into extremest unbelief. Now, I returned very much in the same way. From looking at Christ as a great and illustrious Reformer, I came to see that He must have been a teacher inspired of God. Was He a prophet, I asked myself, of the same order as the prophets of the old dispensation? Yes, I concluded He was this and more. To Him the prophecies pointed, in Him they received their fulfilment, and in Him types and symbols seemed to find their fitting realization. I studied that fifty-third chapter of Isaiah which I have read to you to-night, until I saw how marvellously accurate was the description which it gave of a Being who was to live on the earth hundreds of years afterwards. It looks to me now like a leaf torn out of the New Testament and transferred to the Old. I was familiar with it of course in my early life, but I think I must have forgotten that there was any such chapter in the Bible. I fancy I must have completely overlooked it during the

time I was an unbeliever, so marvellously did it impress me when I came to read it again. Well, concluding that Christ was really and truly the sent of God, I had reached what is called the more orthodox form of Unitarianism. My friends naturally supposed I should stop at this point. There was a fine field of labour open before me amongst Unitarians. I had many excellent friends in the Unitarian denomination, and it is but fair to say that my sympathy and leanings were in that direction. I began again to preach, or, as I preferred to describe it, to deliver discourses, on Sundays on religious subjects. Three years ago I preached the anniversary sermons for my old friend of more than twenty years, the Rev. F. R. Young, of Swindon, then a Unitarian, but now no longer connected with that denomination. I collected around me a large congregation in London to whom I lectured, or preached, every Sabbath day. This gradually developed itself into a Church, which still remains, although terribly shaken by my further change of views with regard to the person of Christ. This one subject haunted me night and day. I could get no rest of mind for thinking of it. I began to see that the claims which Jésus made for Himself were utterly incompatible with His being only a man. I pointed this out to Unitarian friends, men of learning and intellect, thinking that perhaps they could clear away my difficulties, but I became terribly startled at finding that, as a rule, they attached no more importance to the writings of the New Testament than I had done when I was a Secularist. If I quoted the words of my text of to-night, I was told that, in all probability, Jesus never said anything of the kind. If I referred to the opening verses of John's Gospel, and asked what was meant by the Logos, who and what was the Logos, in what sense the Logos was with God, and in what sense it was God, I was referred to

Plato, and from Plato to Philo, and thus plunged back again into the mystic rubbish from which I had escaped when I left behind me the fogs of Strauss and the inanities of Paulus. Clearly, said I, if the New Testament is worth anything at all it must not be thus treated. Either it is true or it is not true, and having already made up my mind that it is, I must be guided by it, and accept what it teaches. I read, and thought, and prayed, and at last a light, as though from Heaven, burst into my mind, and with the full character of Christ before my view I was able to say with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" A hymn that I had written very early in life came to my recollection, one verse of which seemed particularly appropriate to the occasion. It was as follows:—

"Let Glory, Honour, Praise, and Power
To Christ the Lord be given;
Adore Him who is bowed before
By all the hosts of Heaven."

My mind was now at rest, yet I had one thing more to do, which was to tell my congregation of the conclusion at which I had arrived. I did this in two sermons, which I prepared expressly for the purpose, and the result you may easily guess. Large numbers, consisting of Unitarians, Spiritualists, and other kinds of Rationalists, shook their heads, wondering what next; suggested that I had better join Moody and Sankey, and left. I mention these personal details with the view of showing you how I arrived at my present position. The ordeal through which I have had to pass has been a very terrible one. Neglect, persecution, slander, and poverty fell abundantly to my lot. Trials of a temporal character descended upon me thick as hail, and the storm rages still. I realized to the full the Divine

Master's words, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Returning now to the subject of the text from this digression into personal matters, I will endeavour very briefly to ascertain, as far as we can, what is involved in the words, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Jesus is "the Way." In order to understand the necessity for a mediator between God and man, you have but to glance for a moment at the tremendous chasm that exists between the infinite and the finite. Try to picture to your minds what the word infinite means, and you will see how utterly impossible it is to comprehend it. As far as we can understand it, however, it strikes us with terrible awe. Go out on a bright starlight night, and gaze upon the glorious orbs hanging overhead, with which the sky is peopled from horizon to horizon; reflect that each one of these is a sun, around which a whole system of worlds, probably like our own, is being whirled. Then take a telescope, and penetrate into regions of space which the unassisted eye could not reach, and you will discover more suns and worlds crowding on your gaze, until you are lost in wonder. Larger telescopes will show you further, and you get but a repetition of the scene. Worlds on worlds throughout the vast expanse, until even imagination is paralysed at the contemplation of the view. Now, you are told that God made all this, and upholds it every moment by His power; and that even the whole scene combined, and multiplied by millions, is but as small dust in the balance when compared with Him, the Infinite One. What must be the effect of this upon a reverent mind? You are awed into silence, and fall down terrified before the majesty and grandeur of the contemplation. You, the small ephemera of a day! what relation can there be between you and the

infinite? "I have wandered long and far," said one; "but have not found the rest which you say is to be obtained. I have interrogated my own soul, but it answers not. I have gazed upon nature, but its many voices speak no articulate language to me; and more especially when I gaze on the bright page of the midnight heavens, those orbs gleam upon me with so cold a light, and amid a silence so portentous, that I am terrified with the spectacle of the infinite solitude." This, I think, must be the experience of every man who looks at nature from that point of view. Now, what we want here—and I myself have frequently felt the terrible need of this—is something to bridge over this chasm—the chasm between the infinite and finite, between God and humanity. The space by which God is separated from man has been widened by sin. How is it to be spanned? We cannot approach the essence of Deity, nor climb up the stairs of the Universe to the Eternal. We shrink and shudder at the very contemplation of His awful Majesty. Yet, as there is a relationship established between God and man, and as we are not simply His creatures, but His children, it is essential not only that we should approach Him, but that we should be brought into communion with Him. I should like some pure Theist, as he calls himself, to tell me how he proposes to span this wide and yawning gulf. He would say, probably, that all nature was a manifestation of God: that the flowers of springtime, the summer's sun, the autumn fruits, and the frosts and snow of winter, were all so many revelations of God, and serve the purpose of mediation between Him and us. It is clearly not so, however; for although nature smiles in beauty, and bursts forth in loveliness and joy, it is no perfect representation of God. It is not always cheerful, for it abounds with convulsions and storms; and a hundred diseases are some-

times wafted on its gentlest winds. Moreover, man has thrown his own shadow upon the external world in which he moves, and what he beholds is frequently a dim reflection of his own inner nature. The scene is cheerful or melancholy as he is gay or sad, and external things but typify the state of the human mind. Besides, nature does not speak direct enough to the soul. We want some other channel through which the divine peace can flow down to man. Then can Angels or Archangels answer the purpose? They cannot, because, not only can they not bridge the chasm, but they offer an obstruction to the view across its depths. The greatest created being that God has made would be useless as a mediator, because there would be an infinite chasm between him and God on the one hand, and, on the other, he could not approach humanity near enough. Saints and good men, whom the Roman Catholic Church has placed between God and man, we must request to get out of the way, for they transmit no light from the throne of the Almighty, but throw their own dark shadow instead. There is only one Being that can bridge this chasm and make a way for man to God, and He must touch Deity on the one side and be, in every sense of the word, human on the other. Only a man can become a mediator to men, and only God can reveal God to humanity. Nothing but humanity can serve the purpose of becoming the vehicle through which God shall flow to man; yet in that humanity God must dwell. This may be a mystery, but it is the grandest truth that has ever been made known to the human race. God is not a cold, impassive force, as scientists would have us believe; neither does He repose serenely on the peaks of the Universe, as the Stoics taught, leaving the government of the world to inferior beings. He came to man once in the human form, and by virtue of that

humanity which He took must all mediation exist, and through it must flow the Divine Light into the soul of man. Thus we see how Jesus became the way, and the only way by which we can approach God. He is a Being whose nature opened both ways—up to God on the Divine side and down to the lowest man on the human side. And without this mediator it does appear to me that we should be left not only without any approach to God, but without any true conception of God. The mediator was the man Christ Jesus, yet "in Him dwelt all the fulness of the God-head bodily." Hear what He says of Himself: "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?" "All things are delivered unto Me of my Father, and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father, but the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal Him." In this truth the mind, and heart, and conscience, all find rest; for there is turned into the soul the light streaming from Divinity itself. He who wanders out of this way rambles through bogs and quagmires, following Will-o'-the-Wisps to his own destruction; while he who keeps steadily along the path is safe from danger, and shall pursue his course unharmed till the goal is reached. Thus you see in what sense the words of the Lord are true: "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by Me."

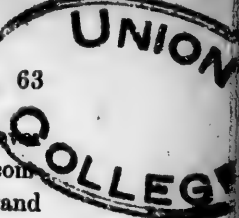
Jesus is the Truth. This term truth is one which we continually come across in the teachings of Christ, and is used here in a sense in which we do not find it employed elsewhere. In all the old philosophies, and in the ancient religions too, Truth was some kind of vague abstraction, which men were to strive after by the exercise of the powers of their intellect. In Christianity, Truth is much more than this. It is not an abstraction, but a stern reality,

the sternest of all realities. When Pilate put the question to Christ, "Art thou a King?" He replied that He came to bear witness to the Truth, and the sceptical Roman immediately propounded the question, "What is Truth?" The Lord gave no answer on this occasion, but He did answer the same question again and again during His earthly life, because His description of Truth was that it was Himself. Truth, therefore, according to this teaching, is not a speculative opinion, nor even an infallible mandate; it is Christ. As a matter of fact, the people in that day who listened to this marvellous doctrine failed to understand it, and, in point of fact, men fail to understand it yet. And hence the great amount of scepticism by which we are surrounded to-day with regard to the possibility of arriving at truth. Humanity is a reflection of God, for human beings were first made in the image of God, which image has been sadly disfigured since by sin; but in this one case the humanity itself was the perfect reflection of God, because it was the incarnation of God. Here the Divine became so blended with the human that the reflection of God was perfect. In God alone is the perfection of Truth to be found; yet Jesus declares Himself to be "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Truth, then, is not a Philosophy, nor a Theology, but a Divine Person; and, recognizing this fact, we learn what the Truth is, and become made perfect through it. You have but to glance over the ancient systems of philosophy and religion to see, on the one hand, how far they all fell short of proclaiming the truth to mankind; and, on the other, how endless and futile were the attempts they made to reach that point which is here so plainly declared. And in this respect Christianity itself becomes the culminating point of all other religions.

These ancient systems were not absolutely false, as they

have sometimes been declared to be; they were all weak and ineffectual attempts to discover the Truth which, in the course of time, was to appear embodied in a human shape. Mr. Gladstone somewhere says: "The history of the race of Adam before the Advent is the history of a long and varied but incessant preparation for the Advent." And this is literally true; because, while we find in Christianity a large number of special principles which are not to be found elsewhere, we find throughout the whole history of mankind perpetual but ineffectual attempts to reach these grand truths. Take for instance the existence of God. Of course it will be said that all religions have recognized a God. This is true; but, at the same time, the ideas which they have inculcated respecting Deity have been of so vague and unsubstantial a character that it was utterly impossible to grasp what was thus put forth. It is perfectly clear that when these men talked of God they had in their minds no very definite conception of what they meant. Take for instance Pantheism, which has flourished at some time or another among nearly every ancient people. You have it in one form in India, in another in Greece, and still more recently it has presented itself under a new aspect in Germany and in England. I described this to you in the sermon of this morning, and, therefore, need not go over the ground again. Suffice it to say that the gist of the whole thing amounts to this: that God is Nature, and Nature God, which is, in truth, really to get rid of God altogether. Pantheism no more than Atheism recognizes a Creator. In neither is there a divine person, and any conception of God apart from personality is impossible. In Brahmanism man was lost in God, and in Buddhism God disappeared in man; and in truth nowhere will you find a clear conception of what God is. The reason is obvious. God is Infinite, and

of the Infinite man cannot conceive, because he lacks the faculties wherewith to grasp anything which extends beyond the finite. We hear a great deal of talk to-day about the "God of Nature." The God of Nature is a name for a vague abstraction about which no definite Idea can exist. Christianity supplied this deficiency, and, therefore, gave us the culminating point of all previous attempts to reach Deity. Christ proclaimed Himself to be the sole Representative of the Father, and in that fact the problem is solved. To the Christian, God is a person, manifested in Christ, conceived of in Christ, worshipped in Christ. And there in particular you have the perfection of Truth. The doctrine of immortality was brought to light by the Gospel. And herein also was the Truth made manifest in Christ. Of course I am not ignorant of the fact that some dim and shadowy ideas of the future world existed among all ancient peoples, just as the same peoples had dim and shadowy conceptions of God; but immortality was not truly known till Christ proclaimed Himself to be "The Resurrection and the Life." We find the doctrine of a future state vaguely set forth in the Vedas; we see it also thickly veiled in the Nirvana; the Persians held it; the Greeks taught it, as the Egyptians had done at a much earlier period. But let any reader turn to the records of these people and see how much information he can gain respecting it. Everywhere it is unsubstantial and unreal; the shadowy under-world of the Greek *Hades*, and even the Hebrew *Sheol*, give us nothing worthy the name of an immortality. Its full realization came to light in Christianity. Everywhere else it is either too vague to grasp or overlaid with a substratum of sensuous fallacies. Nor was a perfect moral law reached elsewhere. We hear much talk to-day of the perfection of the moral precepts that are distributed over



the literature of ancient nations, but no man who has carefully investigated the subject could for a moment compare any of them, or all of them combined, with the grand moral teachings of Christ. The true basis of right and wrong is found in Christianity, and in Christianity alone. Love to man was set forth in Buddhism, and has been again and again proclaimed, but always divorced from its great correlative, of love to God, which alone can give it force. "The very word humanity," says Max Müller, "was unknown before Christianity;" and the great principle of love that we find running like a golden thread throughout the New Testament, is to be met with nowhere else. When Christ came, certain words were in use to convey the idea of love, *Ερως* among the Greeks and *Amor* among the Latins; but these had become associated so thoroughly with sensuality, that new terms were adopted which should express Christian love in its purest form. These words were *Αγαπη* in Greek, and *caritas* in Latin. This fact is significant to show the true character of the love which is there enunciated. Herein too, then, we had the Truth proclaimed as it had not been taught elsewhere. I might go on to deal with a number of the other distinguishing peculiarities of Christianity, and in all of them we should see that Christ was what He professed to be, the Truth. Truth then is infinite; the more you have of it the more there appears to be beyond your grasp; it fell within the range of human cognition once, and only once. God is Truth, and in Christ was Truth personified. From Him all Truth flows. He remarked, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My word shall not pass away," and Why? because it is divine Truth. He was indeed "The Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Jesus is the Life. This phrase is most significant. Divine life in the soul of man is, after all, the most important part

of the Christian character. To know the Truth is not sufficient ; it must be practised, and to be practised it must be thoroughly incorporated into the character. Mere intellectual perception of Truth is of no value ; men must love the Truth, and they will then perform it. In presenting the moral law before the mind, there are two points in which Christianity rises far above all other schemes, and in which, in fact, its chief value as a moral system consists. First, it places before the mind of the man a more powerful motive than is to be found elsewhere ; and, secondly, it imparts to him a power which no other system professes to give. "The science of ethics," says Prof. A. S. Wilkins, "is mainly concerned with the determination of three questions : What method are we to pursue to ascertain what is right ? What code of laws is given us by the method which we adopt ? What motives have we for obedience to this code ? In other words, by what means and in what direction is the conscience—the ethical intellect, as Bunsen calls it—to be guided ? How is the will to be influenced ?" It will be apparent to the most superficial thinker that this latter is a matter of the greatest possible importance. Supposing you had a correct method for ascertaining what is right, and had deduced by that method a perfect moral code, you have yet to place it before men in such a form that they shall accept it and act upon it. And this is just what all the systems of ethics fail to accomplish. It occurred to me again and again when I was an unbeliever that the long string of precepts, looking like proverbs and aphorisms copied out of "Poor Richard's Almanac," which the Secularists string together, and call moral principles, were utterly useless, however good they might be, because they came altogether without authority, and did not present sufficient motive to induce men to obey them. Lactantius says of

the moral teachings of the heathen: "Their precepts have no weight, because they are human, and need a greater authority, even a Divine one. No one, therefore, believes them, because he that hears them considers him that gives those precepts a man like himself." And this is just the position in which moral precepts stand to people in general. They may be very good in their way, but they lack the power to present a sufficient motive for obedience to them. Teach a man what is right, make him understand it, and he is not much the better for the lesson. He may still do wrong, and the truth that you have told him respecting the moral law may have no influence whatever on his character. You may do more than this: you may show him that it would be far better for himself personally if he did the right, which, I suppose, is the very strongest possible motive that a mere natural system can place before a selfish man. He may listen to this, and even be convinced that what you say is true; still, he will not do the right. His inclination to wrong is so strong that he will purchase the gratification of evil-doing, even at the expense of much future suffering. Now, what can you do in such a case? All mere natural systems of morals are powerless. What is needed, it must be apparent to every one, is some stronger motive than has yet been presented. The thing that is required is something that shall make the man love the right. Now, nothing can do this but Christianity, because nothing else can reach the heart. All rules about the regulation of external conduct deal with the superficial on the outside; but the law of Christ penetrates into the inmost recesses of the soul, rectifies the mainspring of action, and therefore necessarily changes the conduct which flows from it. Let a man receive the love of God into his soul and feel the life of Christ implanted in his nature, and he no longer desires to do the

wrong, because he is in love with the right—that is to say, his love for the right will be stronger than any inclination to wrong. Truth in this case has been blended with love; the understanding and the will are both enlisted on the side of right, and the man's character is changed, and, as a matter of course, a change of conduct necessarily follows. An able writer observes: "To St. Paul and the first Christians the law became no longer a stern commandment standing outside of them, threatening them from above, but a warm law of love within them; not only a higher discernment of the good, but a new and marvellous power to do it cheerfully and with joy." This is exactly what is needed. All may not, like the Apostle Paul, possess the mighty faith to move the world, but to the simplest Christian is given some share of the Divine love which prompts to the noblest of actions. The second point in which Christianity is so superior to all other systems is in the power which it imparts to the individual to do what is right. Many a man has a very clear conception of what he ought to do, and is even desirous of doing it, but fails to carry out his inclination in consequence of the want of that spiritual power which would enable him to accomplish the desired result. Now, here Christianity steps in, and supplies not simply the motive, but the power. The life of God in the soul of man enables him to accomplish results which would otherwise be deemed impossible. Here is the grand distinguishing difference between Christian morality and Pagan morality. The latter was one long and perpetual wail and lament at man's inability to be virtuous; the former rejoices in the triumphant cry, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Tennyson remarks:—

" 'Tis life whereof our nerves are scant,
Oh life, not death, for which we pant,
More life and fuller, that I want."

This is to be obtained nowhere but in that eternal life of God manifested in Christ, and through Him extended to everyone who seeks it. Morality becomes, on this principle, not a cold and reluctant obedience to certain rules of conduct which society has approved and philosophers inculcated, but a passionate struggle to grow into the likeness of Him from whom all love flows. Nor is the struggle hopeless, but certain to eventuate in success, since Christ is the life, and that life may be obtained by all for the asking. Thus it will be seen that Christ is the fountain of the Christian strength, and the source of the Christian power, as well as the basis of the Christian moral code. Wherever men become partakers of this divine life they rise superior to the circumstances by which they are surrounded, and learn to surmount all difficulties, endure all wrongs, and overcome all temptation. "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

There is one fact, and a most stubborn one, in connection with human nature, which is the terrible reality of sin. There is a tendency in the Rationalism of to-day to gloss over sin and to call it by some milder name. The pure Theist and the advanced Unitarian, which is very much the same thing, talk a great deal about our failings, the faults we commit, and the mistakes we fall into, but they seem to have struck the word sin out of their vocabulary. Not so the Bible, where sin is constantly described and condemned, and not so experience, where sin terribly abounds. We all know, that is to say, if we have looked into our own hearts, how fearfully we have departed from holiness. "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves," is a truth which every man's experience bears out. Should we meet with a person who declared himself without sin we should put

him down as an impudent boaster, rather than an over-virtuous man. And what is worthy of observation in connection with this point is, that the purer and holier life a man leads the more does he feel himself to be a sinner in the sight of God. 'Tis not those external actions in our lives, but the inner workings of the soul, that so appal us with their blackness. A poet has beautifully observed :—

“It is not what my hands have done
That weighs my spirit down,
That casts a shadow o'er the sun,
And over earth a frown.
It is not any heinous guilt
Or vice by men abhorred ;
For fair the fame that I have built,
A fair life's just reward—
And men would wonder if they knew
How sad I feel with sins so few.

“Alas ! they only see in part,
While thus they judge the whole ;
They cannot look upon the heart,
They cannot read the soul.
But I survey myself within,
And mournfully I feel,
How deep the principle of sin
Its roots may there conceal,
And spread its poison through the frame,
Without a deed that men can blame.”

We want a remedy for all this, and it is to be found nowhere but in Christ. Moral philosophy cannot change the heart, codes of ethics cannot purify the soul, rationalistic schemes are valueless in the work of regeneration. The grace of God, and it alone, can accomplish what is needed. It is customary now-a-days to ridicule what is called conversion as being solely imaginary ; but, depend upon it, it is one of the most important realities of life. By the operation of the Spirit of God on the soul, alone, can sin be cured, and the man who feels himself a sinner will also feel the

importance of the words of the text, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

In conclusion, I may remark that the application of Christianity to the wants of the age is, in my conception, most perfect. You cannot have a better illustration of the necessity of this religion than is to be found in the fact that the men who reject it, and profess to have outgrown it, have gone back again to the condition of their predecessors eighteen hundred years ago. When Paul went to Athens he found the people worshipping the "Unknown God," and that is exactly what scientific men are doing again to-day. The Tyndalls and the Huxleys, *et hoc genus omne*, are proclaiming to-day a God that is unknowable, and from their standpoint they are right, for there is no real knowledge of God out of Christ. In Him, too, may be found a solution of many of the problems which this age presents. To-day the question is shouted by sages, and re-echoed by the mob, "What is Truth?" Here is the answer, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." "What is God?" is a question that is being asked on every hand. The reply comes, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth." "Spirit," sneers the sceptic, "I can't conceive of Spirit; I want something more tangible." Here it is then; listen to Christ's words: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father, for I am in the Father and the Father in Me." "Is man immortal?" the unbeliever asks sneeringly, and the common people inquiringly, and the answer comes, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." In the vast turmoil of business, and amongst the thousand cares and anxieties that press us down on every hand, we feel the need of rest, rest of mind. Jesus exclaims, "Come unto Me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Around us there is dense spiritual darkness,

shutting out the bright light of the sun, and obscuring our gaze on every hand. Here is the remedy, "I am the light of the world." We feel ourselves alone when friends have proved treacherous and companions false. Then comes in the glorious promise, "Lo! I am with you ~~always~~ unto the end of the world." And when sin crushes us down, and rises up in our midst like huge trees of the forest, seeming to flourish and triumph, while virtue droops and holiness appears to hang its head, then comes the grand proclamation made eighteen hundred years ago, and remaining as potent to-day as when first uttered, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world."

Thus have I put before you briefly my present position, the mode in which I have been led to it, and the arguments behind which I think I may safely entrench myself, bidding defiance to all the scepticism of the age. I can only, in conclusion, repeat before this congregation the resolution long since made, to adhere by the grace of God to the truth as it is in Jesus, and addressing myself to Him, who is the "Author and Finisher of our faith," exclaim:—

"While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyelids close in death,
When I rise to worlds unknown,
And behold Thee on Thy throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

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